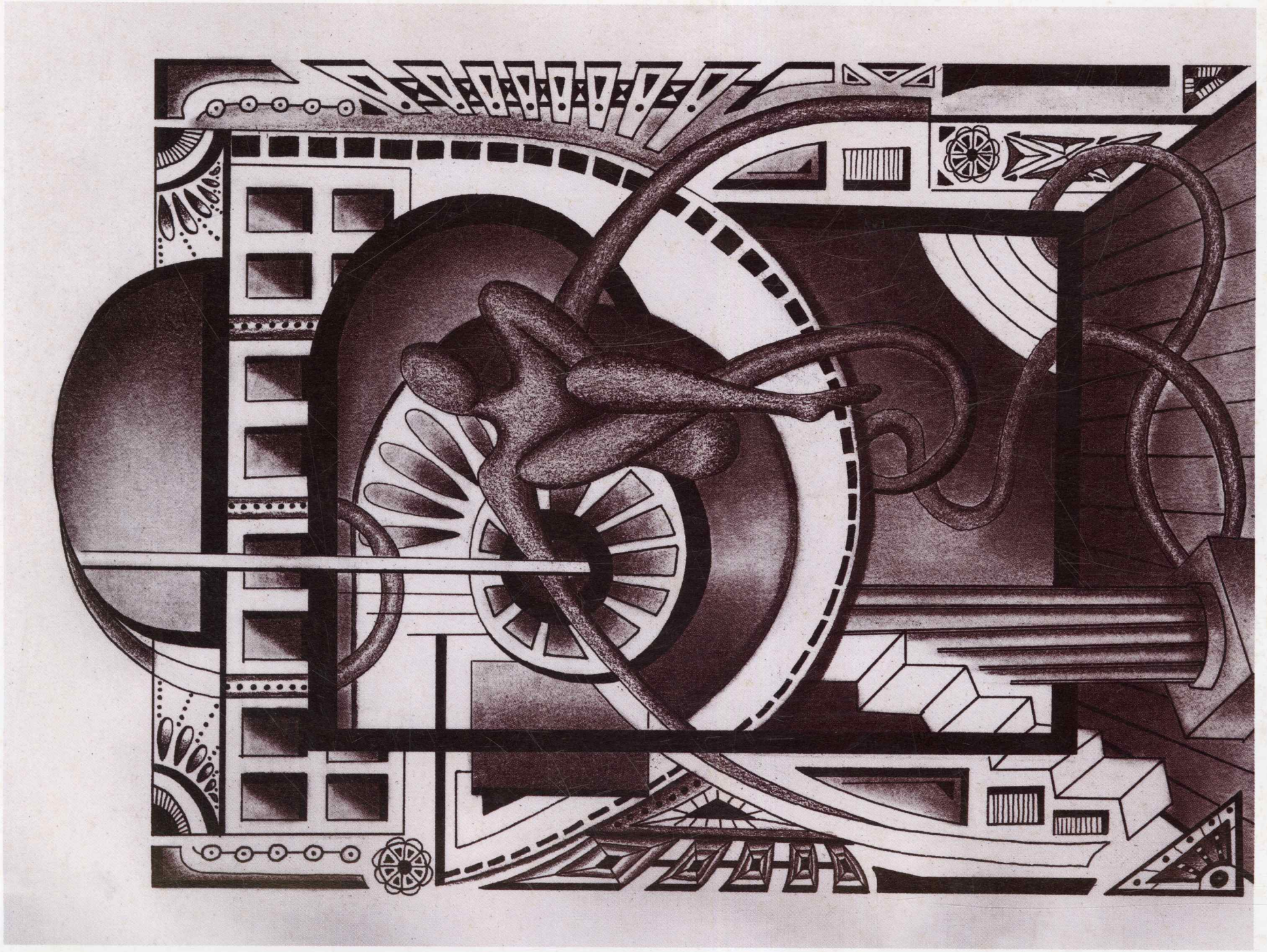
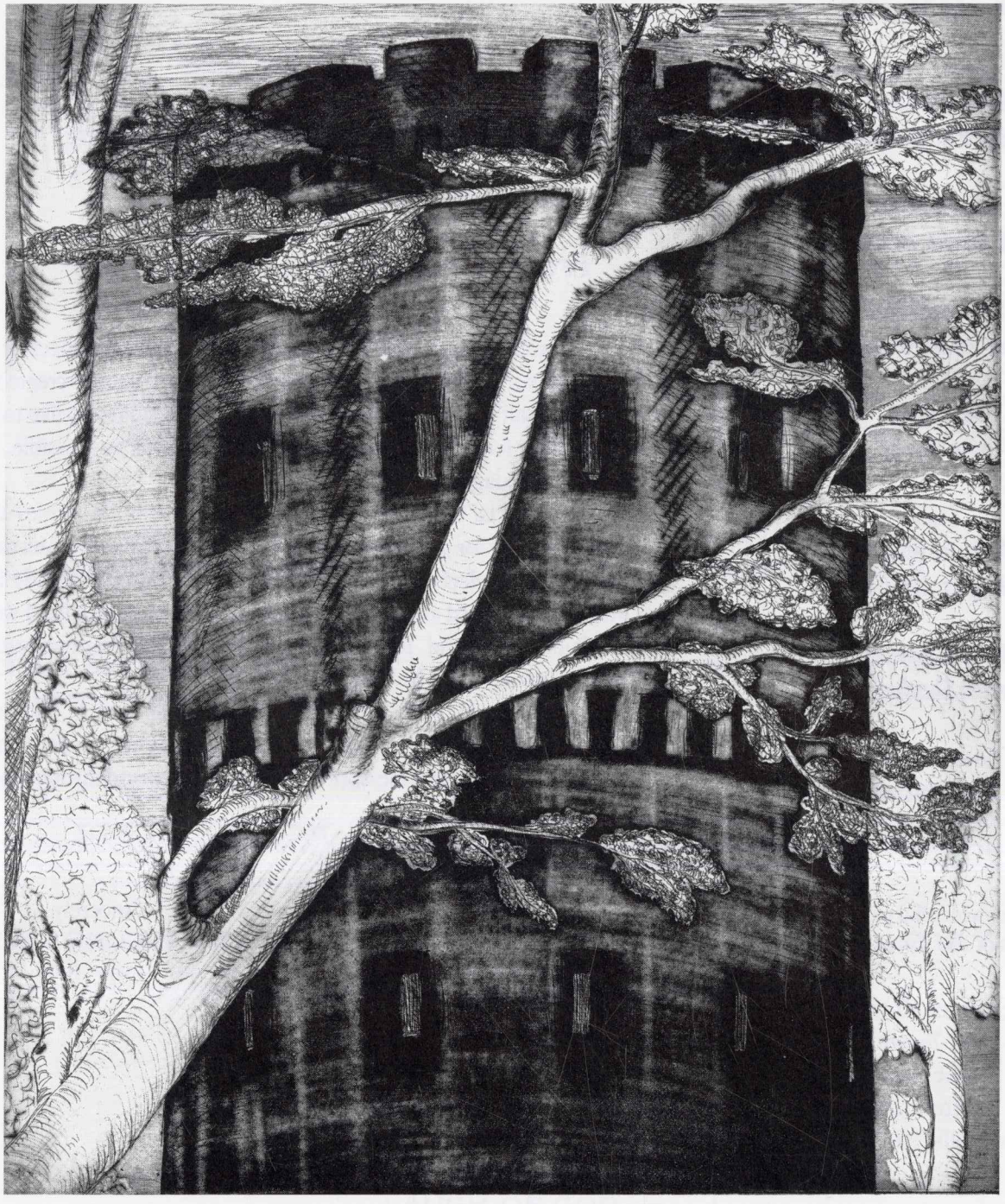


the TOWER



Untitled
David McKinney
Printmaking

CORE

1996

the
TOWER

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From the Editor...

I would like to take a brief moment to extend my sincerest apologies for the tardiness of this publication to all who have helped create this magazine, and to all who have anticipated its arrival. I would also like to thank our contributors for without them, no magazine would be possible. (If only it could be 200 pages.)

A special thanks is due to Dr. William Cobb, Dr. Sidney Vance, and Glenda Conway for judging the literary awards as well as Ted Metz and Catherine Dunn for selecting our artistic winners. Undying gratitude is given to Cynthia Shackelford and Earline Howell for their incessent hard work in Student Publications and to Holly Flowers for her help in proofreading when our eyes and intellect became too strained.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines core as, "an inmost part of something." With your help, we have attempted to capture part of the essence, the center, and the *Core* of our immense world through these pages. Never stop creating...

Sincerely,
Nichole Y. Hamilton
Core, 1996

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Silicon Lullaby

I

Relax!
The great western expansion is over at last,
Route 66 is gone gone gone and each state is connected
By a ribbon of identical superduperhighways
And every little target market town has one honest to by God Gap,
Another Gap for Kids, and an acceptable Comfort Zone Gap.

So relax!
Don't think subversive thoughts—
No need!
The Sony Corporation will package
Anti-establishment alternative rock
On shiny silver discs,
And rebellious Henry Rollins is here in his $15 Gap Pocket-T
To set us straight about corporate America
Live via satellite from the set of his latest film.
Hey, we've got a credibility Gap
And an attention deficit disorder.

We've won the war against uniqueness!
We've eliminated the need for going On The Road.
Hook up the modem, order out for pizza, shop via credit card,
Why get involved in messy old life at all?
You say you want excitement?
Have you been caught in the WorldWideWeb yet?
Have you ever had a sex change at your ATM machine?
Have you ever inseminated pit bulls from your office fax phone?
Have you ever seen the complete works of Shakespeare
Etched by laser light onto the head of a pin?
You WILL, and the pinheads who will bring it to you are AT&T.

So relax!
We've anticipated your need for speed and thrills;
Each state of mind is connected
By a ribbon of identical phone cables.
Why not take a trip on the information superhighway
Just like a cyber Jack or a fiber-optic Neal
O maybe just a tiny digital Chuck Berry
With "No Particular Place To Go,"
Spinning virtual wheels on binary asphalt.

(Just between you and me,
Do we really NEED that much pre-processed information?
Can we build a global community one lonely terminal typist at a time?)
Does the glow from the screen really make you go blind?

II

My grandmother took me in when I was a battered boy in Birmingham.
She was fifty years old when I was born,
All wrinkling skin and greying dreams;
She had the harder life.
She had known the Depression,
But she gifted me with hope,
Talked about the joys of Jesus and the promise of America,
Taught me about bravery and tolerance and love and chocolate milk.

She taught me that Christ was a rebel and a pacifist
And that He was betrayed for a handful of silver.
She told me that the Negroes and the earnest young men from up North
Who came to stay with us were going on a freedom march.
She told me not to be scared when the threats came on the telephone
And in the mail
And on the street.
And at night when I couldn't sleep,
She lay with me and sang to me of a better place.

And here's what happened:
Daddy sobered up and Mommy took him back
And they came and took me away to live across the ocean
And I grew up and got really busy and my grandmother got lonely
And watched a lot of TV
And the TV preachers taught her that Christ wanted us all to conform
And kill abortion doctors in the name of God
(and the Alzheimer's was taking hold by then)
And she started sending them money
And they fed her name into a computer
And that computer talked to other computers
And all the computers knew her name was Eloise
And all the computers wrote her nice earnest letters
Asking their dear friend Eloise for more money.

continued

And She had grown up in small town America
In a place called Chatum, Alabama
Where you called your neighbors by name
And she didn't understand about computers
And she was proud to be so giving to these impassioned pen pals
And by the time I moved back South she was broke and crazy
And she died last year in a fleabag nursing home that smelled of piss
And I buried her in a cheap casket
With her gnarled hands cradling a dime store stuffed animal,
(The last lost creature she had taken in
During her dying days of wild-haired, wild-eyed lunacy)
And a small cross of dull silver was hanging limp
On a chain around her neck
And I knew she always believed she had done the right things.
I have the older scars,
Yet she is the sad and cynical yin to my goofy hopeful yang.
She makes me feel old, she makes me feel young,
She makes me feel something.
And goddamn if that doesn't feel good.

And as I watch her peaceful slumber—
See the wide shoulders rise and fall,
See her body shining like a revelation
In a thin sliver of windowshade quicksilver moonlight,
Observe the slim hips and the defiant breasts
And the artist's patient hands,
Marvel at the freckles, freckles everywhere
(Little dots moving up and down with her breathing,
Stretching forever over her cloud-soft hills and valleys
Like some crazy curvy seductive pop art landscape)—

I have an urge to nestle my head
Against her skin
Where the fine hairs of her face
Melt into the alabaster smoothness of her neck,
To brush my lips against her ear,
To ask her to run away with me tonight
And leave the computer and the TV and the AT&T behind

And see if America is still out there
Somewhere,
Hiding.

Randy Williams

Cafe du Monde
John Deaver
Black & White Photography

Kid Look

there's a certain look that I want to catch
in everyone's eye
it is a look I sometimes feel
I have forever lost

it is the look of Kids

it is the look of Danny Scott...
long-lost pal of mine

not today's Danny Scott:
he who exists

as Striped Convict Cursing Behind Steel Bars
as Another Rotten Singer In Another Rotten Band
as Annoying Theater Ticket Boy
as Unfortunate Soul Wrapped In Paper On The Street
as Yet One More Unlucky Corpse

see, I'm not too sure at all of today's Danny Scott...
the look I crave to catch
is the look of Kid Danny Scott:

he who sat next to me sneaking a cigarette
in the cemetery

eyes all big and longing
tennis-shoes sinking in the mud, musing at Death
burning anything we could find
lost in the woods for hours and hours

all-night conversations fixed on confusion
and
abandonment...

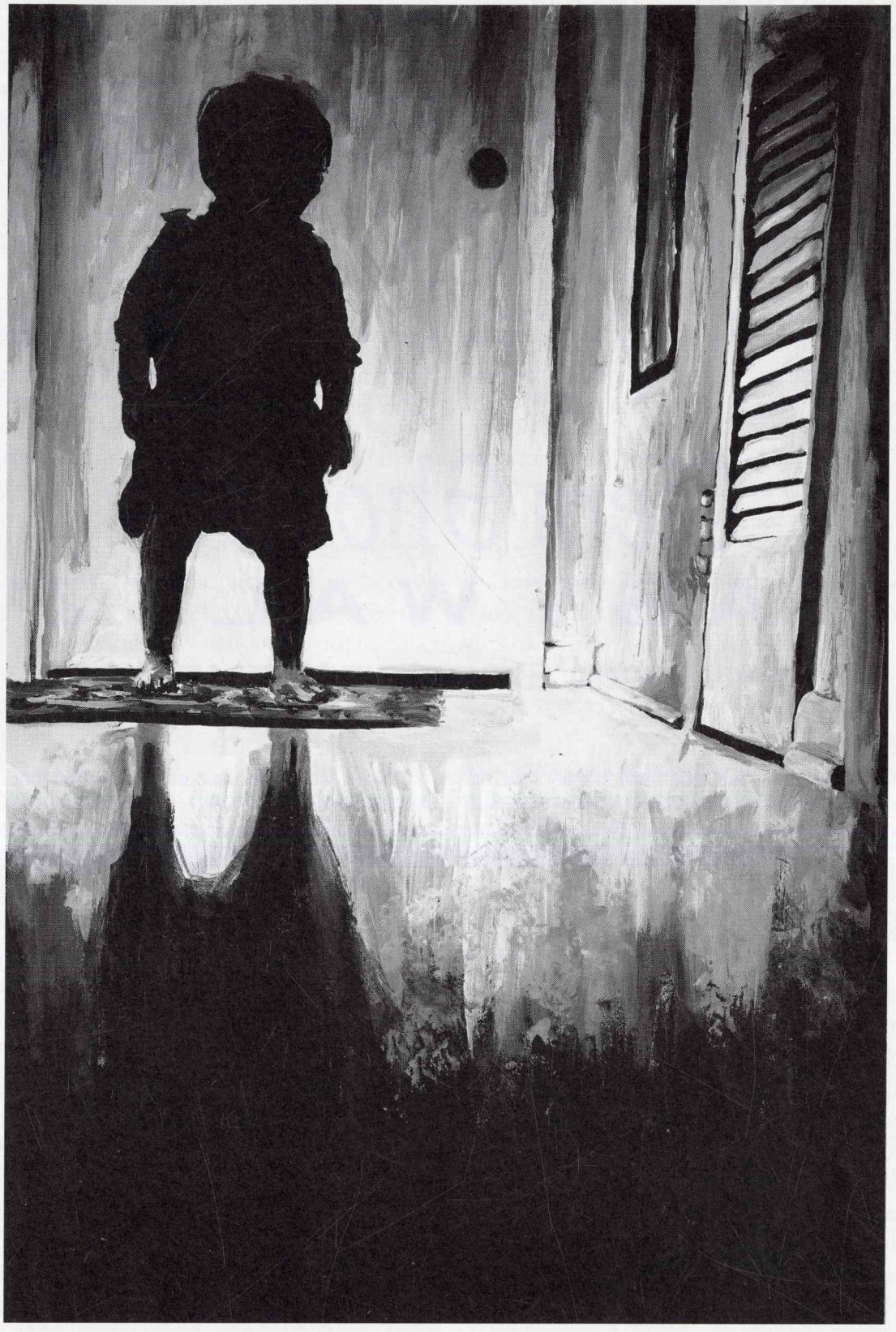
he, his Run-Away Mom
me, my Dead Dad

the Kid Look could allow me to really Look

into someone's
anyone's eyes
and suddenly See
both of our big and longing Kid-soul Eyes
staring back at each other.

Paul Wilm

1996 Tower Award



Untitled
Carrie Mcgrann
Acrylic

Clem Shook's LAST WALTZ

BY JOHN STEERE WENDEL

CLEM SHOOK SAT AT THE BAR AND took a sip from his glass of red wine. It was very late, and he was just beginning to feel light. He licked his teeth which were dry and tasty. He had always liked red wine. He even liked the cheaper varieties that he had always been prone to drink, and that he was drinking on this particular night. It was December which meant that most of the fraternity kids that the Street Light generally catered to had gone away. Clem liked sitting there in the quiet, listening to the juke box music in the wee hours of the night. He had forgotten exactly what had drawn him here, except maybe his taste for the red wine, or perhaps a friend had invited him for a drink and forgotten to show, or maybe he had come in with every intention of warming up for just a minute or two as he wandered about the quiet town alone and in the cold.

The bartender wiped down the opposite end of the bar from where Clem was sitting. His name was Jack McDonald. He was a local kid who attended the university in town. As he cleaned the bar, he whistled some tune that didn't match that of the one playing on the jukebox. Clem lit a cigarette and looked up at Jack, waving his smoking hand.

"You know Jerry, I quit smoking once..."

"Wait, lemme guess," said Jack, "but you couldn't figure out what to do with your right hand while you held a drink in your left hand."

"He...yea, somethin' like that. Hey Jerry, how 'bout gettin' me another glass of this fine red wine."

"Ah-ite Mr. Shook, but I gotta be closin' up soon."

Jack poured Clem another glass and set it on a napkin.

"There ya go Mr. Shook."

Clem took a small sip from the glass and licked his teeth. He put the glass down and stared at his hands. They had aged more poorly than the rest of him. They were full of deep cracks that turned into a multitude of little tributaries. His finger nails were speckled with different colors of oil paint. He had done little more than dabble on the canvas over the past few years but had at one time been quite an artist.

He never sold enough to carve out much of a living but he had had a few productive years. And in those days, his painting at least helped to pay the bills and put wine and food in his stomach.

He remembered one painting in particular of a woman who had long locks of auburn red hair and enormous bare breasts. She wore a long paisley print skirt and held a watermelon across her stomach. For some reason this painting had made him more money than many of his paintings combined and had become the source of much discussion among certain circles. People were especially interested in the symbolic significance of the watermelon. He used to attend what he liked to call "goddamned artsy parties," where people would present their many theories and postulates concerning the "multi layers of meaning" in this piece. His response was always the same:

"Naw see, I just always kinda liked women with, you know, big titties. Too, I always thought watermelons were kinda pretty...and tasty. Anyway, I figured the two things would go together kinda nice. Don't you?"

Clem chuckled and shook his head.

"What you laughin' at Mr. Shook?"

"Aww, I was just thinkin' about some asshole I used ta know."

"I see. Well, I hate ta bust up the good time, but the place is clean and I gotta go."

"I guess I'll have to find some other place to be disorderly then."

"I'm afraid so."

Clem lifted his glass which was three fourths full and swallowed it down in two large gulps.

"Listen," he said. "I gotta piss."

"Ah-ite. Make it quick."

Clem stood up and clutched the bar in order to gain his balance. When he walked into the bathroom, his nostrils were infiltrated by the strong odor of mint scented sanitizer and urine. His stall was filled with a variety of graffiti that he read while he relieved himself. It was for the most part the usual stuff: for a great blow job call " ", fuck you, screw you, bite me, eat me, eat my shorts, say no to drugs, etc... There was also a strange theological argument penned in different colored ink and in different styles of hand scrawl. Clem chuckled and felt around for a pen in his front coat pocket. He could find none and said, "oh well," to himself.

On his way out of the Street Light he put a twenty dollar bill on the bar.

(continued)

"Thank you Mr. Shook."

"No problem, Jerry."

"By the way, the name's Jack."

"No problem, Jeff."

◆◆◆

The night air had become even colder and Clem's breath came steaming out of his hairy nostrils in long billows. It felt good. He fingered around in his pocket for a cigarette, found one, and smoked. He could still taste the red wine on his teeth and wished he could have another drink. The nearest open store was too far to walk and he was certain that it was too late to bug any of his acquaintances or friends for a drink. He tried not to think about it and walked along the barren street bundled up in his warm brown coat.

Above, the moon shone full and bright through clouds which slowly crept through the dark starless sky. There was a baseball field nearby. Clem went to it, laid down, and propped his head up on a chain link fence. He put out his cigarette, lit another one, and stared at the moon.

His father used to tell him that when he died the Lord was going to punish him by putting him on the moon so he could watch his only son, Clem, disgrace him as he, in his turn, grew up and turned old. There was a tattoo of a naked lady that his father wore on the bicep of his right arm. Whenever he flexed his muscles the tattoo breasts would swell and the tattoo vaginal lips would open wide. Clem was glad that he did not have to look at that trick anymore.

"Well," said Clem to the moon. "Here I am. I hope your satisfied. You can do that trick all you want now. No one's watching."

As Clem lay there, his eyes grew heavy. He let out a long steamy yawn, closed his eyes, and fell into a haze. His sleep was dreamless and was soon disrupted when his cigarette burnt down to his fingers. When he woke, the clouds had uncovered the moon. He squinted his eyes as it was unexpectedly bright. He smelled singed hair and realized what it was that had woken him.

"Yeeeowww, Jesus!" he exclaimed. He shook his hand wildly, and tossed the cigarette out into the field. He studied his new wounds which consisted of two white marks, one on his index finger, and the other on his middle finger. They were not all that bad, but the cold air made them sting. While he examined the newly acquired burns, he heard the light sound of foot steps tapping along the cold icy brown grass. He looked and saw patches of black and white slowly approaching.

"Claude?" he said to the oncoming animal, though he wasn't for sure who or what it was.

The tapping feet picked up, and soon he could make out the full features of a black and white mutt with a cow's face. The dog dashed toward Clem, madly shaking his hind quarters and his tail. He threw his paws around Clem's lap and licked Clem's bristly face with his long pink tongue.

"Where's your goddamned manners, Claude?" asked Clem, pushing the dog away from him.

Claude let out a short growl followed by a bark. He jumped in circles a couple of times.

"I sure wish I was as happy to see you as you were to see me. Com'ere Claudy."

Clem stretched out his hand and puckered his lips, making a kissing noise. Claude jumped turning a semi-circle, dipped his head a couple of times, and slowly approached Clem's enticing fingers. Clem scratched the dog behind the ears for a second and then used him for a crutch to help him stand.

"Thank you Claude, old buddy."

Claude let out a pathetic whine and pawed Clem's blue jeans. Clem gave him another scratch behind the ear.

"Christ you're persistent Claude. Kinda like my ex-wife... Wait, Maybe I was the persistent one. Aw hell, he-he, I guess it don't really matter anymore."

Clem stood in silence for a second and kicked at a tuft of grass. Claude sat on his hind quarters and looked up at Clem. His tongue stuck out of his mouth like a big pink cigar.

"Nope, I guess it don't really matter anymore. Well, come on Claudy. Let's go see if we cain't find any trouble ta get into."

Clem got a cigarette out of his pocket, lit it, and smoked. He and the dog crunched along the icy damp grass and onto the road. As they walked under the street lights, Clem examined their elongated shadows. When he and his ex-wife Sarah first started dating many-many years ago, the couple would humor themselves on Summer nights drinking warm beers and playing with their shadows under street lights. Clem would sing,'K. Sarah, K. Sarah, Whatever we be, we be,' while Sarah spun around causing her skirt to twirl like an ancient red umbrella. The song was silly but it made Sarah laugh.

Clem began to whistle the melody of the song, thought better of it, and dragged on his cigarette. He stepped onto the street where his shadow wouldn't show.

Clem and the dog got onto the sidewalk of Ivy Street. Everything was still and quiet with the exception of a buzzing telephone wire and the sound of Claude panting.

"Well Claudy, I guess its just the two of us for the rest of the night. How about me and you go see if we cain't find us a spare beer or a couple sips of wine over at the house."

Claude did not respond, but just tapped along beside him. As they walked along the sidewalk together, Clem noticed that Lydia Lane had left a light on in her house, and that her porch light was on as well.

(continued)

"Goddamn, what I wouldn't give to lay next to Lydia Lane tonight. Alright Claude, be quiet."

Clem scratched his chin and slowly approached Lydia's front porch. He took a seat on the steps, lit a cigarette, and contemplated a course of action.

"Maybe I'll just write her a note, " Clem whispered.

He reached inside his coat and found a small note pad and a pen. He scrawled a few sentences on a sheet and quietly read aloud:

"Our hearts met in a dream about Las Vegas. A place we've never been before. Buckets of quarters, hairy chests adorned in gold, big bright lights on concrete, and rows of long long legs all rang out like a lonesome cowboy singing in an asphalt desert."

Clem crumpled up the piece of paper and threw it in the lawn.

"What the hell kind of a lady would wanna read somethin' like that? Aw hell, I guess its just you and me tonight after all Claudy."

Before he could stand up, the front door slowly opened making a horrible creaking noise. Clem turned his head. His throat burned with anticipation and fear at the thought of seeing Lydia. The silhouette of a big bushy mustache and a big round nose slowly crept throughout the cracked door.

"Is that you, Jefferson?" asked Clem.

"Well ain't that America," said the tired scratchy voice of Jefferson Miller. "Goddamn Clem Shook, what the hell are you doin' here?

"Hell, I don't know. I'm..ahh...just a little drunk I guess. And I wanted to sit down and take a little rest."

Jefferson stuck the rest of his head out. It looked pale and tired.

"What the hell are *you* doin' here?"

"Well, he-he, I'll tell you all about it in the mornin'. It's late and I'm freezin' my ass off. Go on to bed Clem."

"Yea alright."

Jefferson shut the door. Clem stood up and called Claude to join him. The door made a horrible creaking noise again and Jefferson spoke.

"You still wanna watch that fight on T.V. tomorrow?"

"Ahh...yea sure. Yea, I'll see you tomorrow then."

"Good night, Clem."

"Yea..okay.."

Clem hung his head down low and continued walking down the sidewalk. Claude hiked his leg and pissed on a bush causing great clouds of steam to rise from the bush, as if a little man lived inside and was warming himself to the glow of a fire.

"Hurry up Claude."

Claude finished his business with the shake of a leg and caught up with Clem.

"Well goddamn, I guess ole Jefferson beat me to her. That son of a bitch. I'll give it two weeks. Two weeks, and he'll have her half out of her goddamned mind. Hell, I'd last at least a month."

Clem and Claude turned a corner on Glenn Iris street. They were nearing the house.

"Ain't it past your bedtime," asked a female voice in the dark.

Clem looked up and saw the figure of his next door neighbor, Jaynell Rogers. Her face was dark, but he could see that she had on the yellow outfit that she wore to her job as a waitress.

"Yea, I guess it is. What are you doin' up at this hour?"

"I gotta work a late shift tonight at the Pancake Hut."

"Why do you work at that god-awful place?"

"Well, it pays the bills. Besides it beats bein' a bum like yourself."

"Bum!? I'm no bum."

"Oh yea, then what are you?"

"I'm Clement Randall Shook: Artist and jack of all trades."

"Oh, okay..," said Jaynell, crossing her arms and nodding her head.

"Listen Jaynell, how about me and you do a little dance."

"What!? Are you drunk?"

"Well.....yes, of course. That is to say, just a little."

"Look, I gotta get to work."

"Come on just a little two step before I gotta go to bed. Alone."

"Alright, alright. But, we gotta make it quick. I've been late to work twice this week."

Clem whistled some nameless melody and offered his hand to Jaynell. She took it, they began to dance, and she said:

"You to drunk to lead?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because your dancin' a waltz."

"Of course this is a waltz. Hmmm hmmm hmmm hmm hmmmmm..."

"You said we was gonna dance a two step."

"Aw hell, I don't know the difference. I think I failed that class."

Clem continued humming his nameless melody. The couple danced in the early morning darkness, while Claude pawed away at an imaginary foe in the grass. Clem whispered in Jaynell's ear:

"Why don't you call in sick and come home with me tonight, Sarah?"

"Look, I really got to get ta work, okay?"

Jaynell pushed him away.

"Why don't you take them old bones of yours over to your house and get some sleep."

"Aw, come on little girl. The night is still young."

"Hell no, the night ain't young. Besides, I haven't paid my rent this month."

"I'll pay it.

"Oh hell no you won't." *(continued)*

"All right, all right. I guess I'll be on my way. Come on Claudy."

Clem and the dog walked toward the house.

"Goodnight Clem."

"Goodnight Darlin'."

Jaynell got inside of her red bug. She lit a cigarette, rolled down her window, and yelled to Clem:

"Hey, who the hell is Sarah?"

"Huh?" replied Clem, who could not hear over the rattle of the engine.

"Oh, never mind."

Jaynell rolled up the window and drove off. Clem unlocked his door and entered his house.

◆◆◆

The house was dark and the air was stagnant. Clem felt around for a light switch, found one, and turned it on.

"Come on Claudy, let's see if we cain't find us somethin' to drink."

Claude found a place to rest in the living room, and Clem went into the kitchen to search for that eternally missing bottle of wine. The closest thing to red wine that his pantry housed was a bottle of cooking sherry. He looked in his refrigerator, found a cold beer, and went back to his living room.

"Well Claudy, looks like we're gonna have to settle for a cold beer."

Claude thumped his tail on the floor a couple of times and nodded off to sleep. Clem lay down on his sofa, and took a couple pulls off of his beer.

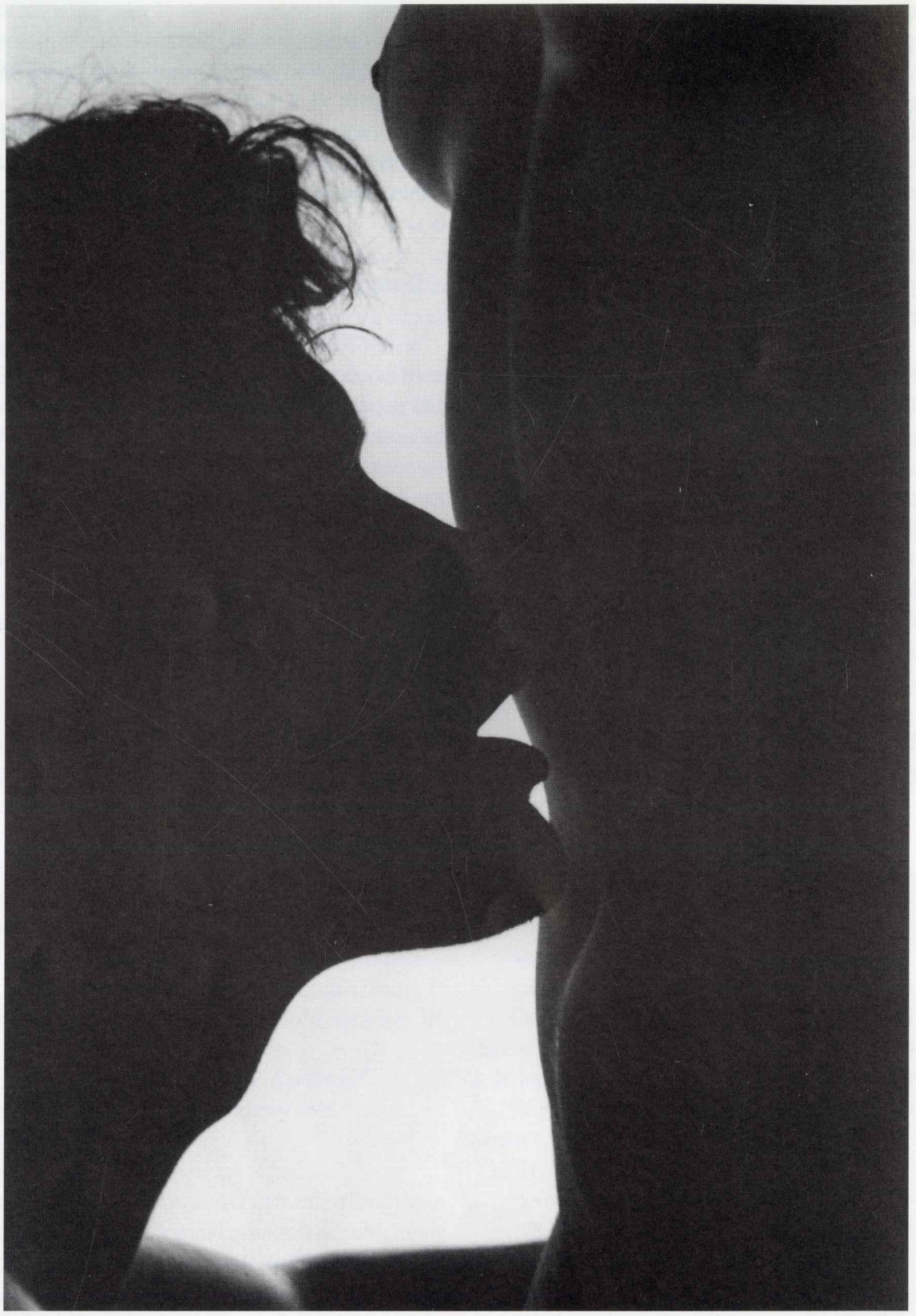
It had been another long winter night of nothing much at all. His eyes were heavy. He tried not to shut them because he wanted to finish his beer, but he could not fight the strong force of sleep.

"Here I am," he murmured as his eyes glazed over, "you old sum-un-a-mmm."

◆◆◆

Claude woke up after an hour of deep sleep, and he felt a need to relieve himself. He slowly stepped toward Clem, yawning and stretching along the way. He nudged Clem in the face with his nose. Clem did not react. His face was cold and alabaster white. Claude nudged him again, but Clem would not move. Claude began to whine and pawed at Clem's torso, but Clem just lay there silent and motionless. Claude tapped over to the front door. He stuck his snout in the crack at the bottom. He let out a series of short loud barks, but nobody heard him.

◆◆◆



Untitled
Stacey Gilliom
Black & White Photography

May I Undress You

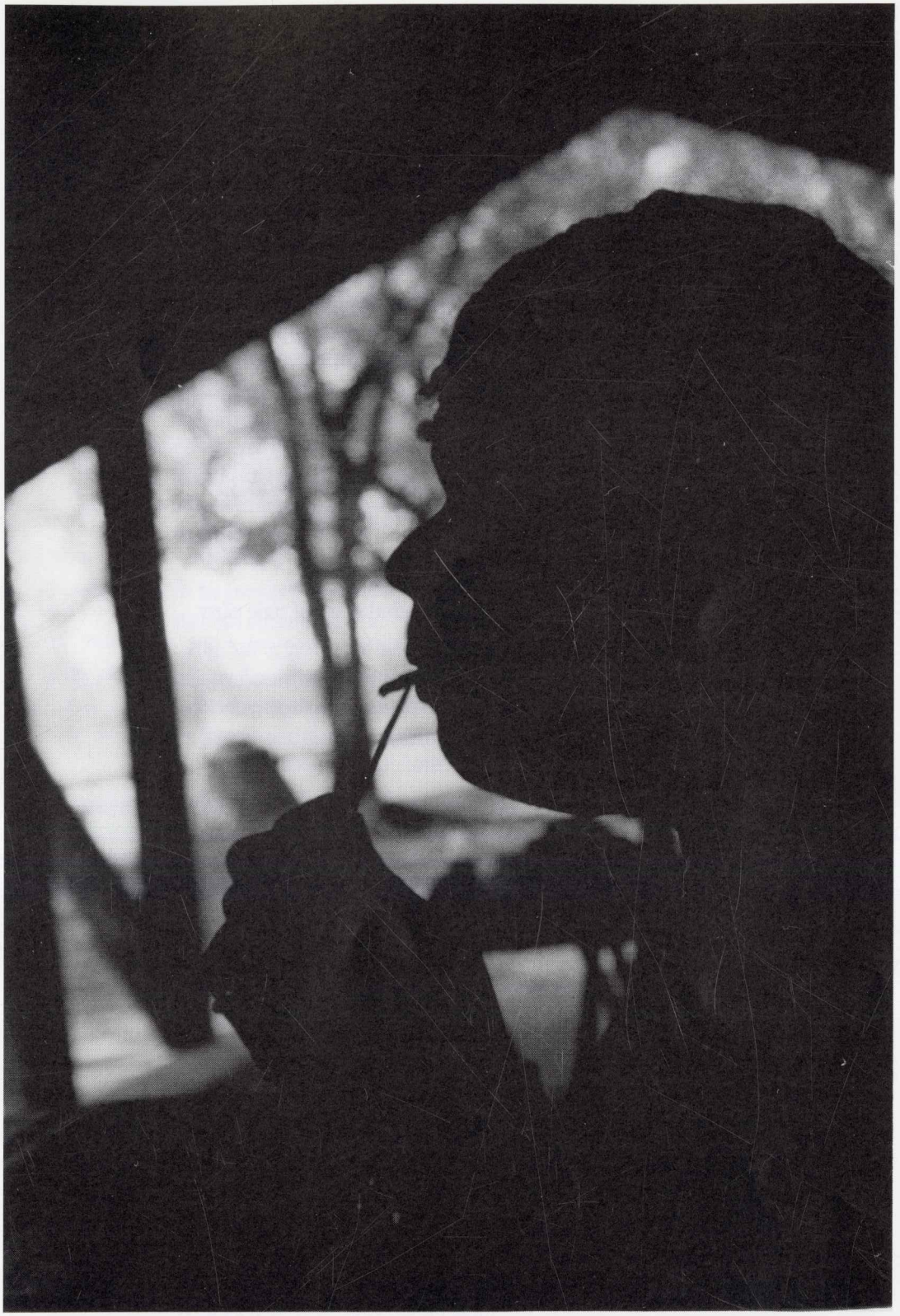
May I undress you with my eyes?
You look so tempting and delicious.
The temperature in here has risen,
But no one else can tell.
I love undoing buttons, one by one.
Ideal, I'd say, for a day like this.
Undoing buttons, one by one,
You are exposed.
My lips can find your neck and shoulders.
Take that shirt off so that I may run
My fingernails lightly down your back.
I can shower little kisses on that vertical trail.
Now, those pants(nice as they are)
Must come off.
What might you be wearing underneath?
Interesting subject, to say the least.
I would do some research on that.
Ah, you are wearing a belt today.
Not to worry, my friend,
I know how to undo those too.
Delicious.
The button is unbuttoned.
Now, how would you like me to unzip you?
There is more than one way, you know.
Pants fall to the floor.
You are left wearing two things—
Your boxers and a smile on your face.
This is where I get a little shy.
Come to me, baby,
So that I can use my personal touch.
Of course, I could do it from here,
If you dare me to.
Do you feel naked now?
Mmm...a delicious feeling.
One on one.
Draw those curtains shut
And let me take that smile off your face.
Sweet lips, seducing hands, body heat.
So...may I undress you with my eyes?
You look so tempting and delicious.
The temperature in here has risen.
Can you tell?

B.C. Smit

Montevallo Story

The singer on the stage sings
Like he thinks he's a stranger here
But the room is full of people
Who saw him throw up
Just the week before.
A girl in the back corner of the room
Thinks her life wold be so much cleaner
If the bottle at her feet
Was not quite so empty now
Or maybe another one, and she says to me:
Did you hear about him?
Yes, oh yes!
Did you know, oh!
Did you hear, oh!
It will never same
What a shame
Nothing has changed.

Patrick Mayton



Untitled
Amy Griffin
Black & White Photography

Love Story

I sit on the stairway and wait.
Last night's nickel which fell from your pocket is cold,
and sticks to the bottom of my bare foot.
I won't tell you I found it, you'd only say keep it.

I can hear the closing of your truck door.
Pennies flop, clanging all around your Elk Woods,
and I bet you didn't look down.

I'm so happy you're home.
(I'm ready to embrace your acquired scent of stale cigar
and red dirt.)
You appreciate my waiting.
The words "I love you" echo as you kiss me, on the cheek,
and pass by.

I tip toe behind you, imagining myself asking about your day,
and these helter skelter places love takes you,
if you like the circle dance,
and how come nobody ever said it would be
all scattered and out of focus.

Never mind. I own the nickel now.
Pennies rest stoically on the warm concrete, awaiting
the man I'll never really know.

Kambria White

Action at a Distance

You are
As far away as Africa,
two oceans and a continent between us,
hanging with the hippopotami,
hiding in the tall grass with zebras,
running with the cheetahs—
so elusive that the same slice of sun
can't stay on your back for even a second;

As far away as my great-aunt Rosemary,
who lives in the same town,
but I haven't seen since I was thirteen
Because my grandmother banished her from the family
after she forgot to bring a turkey
to the get-together after Granny's funeral;

As far away as the cricket hum and locust song
that was the musical score
to the half-lit faerie dust motes
of just after the swollen red-clay Sun
sunk into the longleaf pine horizon
on the evening that my cousin Scott nearly died
in the gully behind Dickson Lane;

As far away as the troop of ambulances, paramedics, and fire-trucks
that came to visit Aunt Irma one evening after a fish-fry dinner,
Uncle Donnie late one night when he took too much insulin,
and finally,
Grandpa.
Though I wasn't there to see
Because I was at my boss's house, lying on the floor,
letting him kiss each part of my body slowly;

As far away as this poem after my roommate opens the door
and swings in on greased rails,
pulling in all of the frustration of Fall,
and (biting her nails) calls a boy
to converse with his answering machine in high pitched excitement.
Then, deflated, sinks back to reality, brushes her teeth and gives me
a hug;

As far away as never, never, never again,
Because my letter (fifteen pages) couldn't hold enough of me
for you to touch, to hold, to fall in love with.

Jesseca Cornelson

1996 Tower Award

Untitled
Abby Gorum
Printmaking

Treatise on the Galilean Transformation and Electromagnetic Theory

The physicists have concluded:
ether does not exist
period
there is no propagation medium.
there is no massless, elastic matter.
there is no "fifth essence".
nothing flows unnoticed

The physicists have concluded:
ether is an arbitrary hypothesis
period
there is nothing between nucleus and electron.
there is nothing between star and planet.
just all that-
space

The physicists have concluded:
ether is a product of nineteenth century romanticism
period
ether is a nifty notion
period
ether is—for the most part—an insipid idea to those of us who understand the dynamics of wave motion. ether does not exist. there is nothing that connects
period

I pause at these conclusions.
I, who am witless and Godless and without proper electromagnetic education.
I, who continues to propagate this organic frame through the space-time continuum
Stops.
stands still.
and lets the current of pure ether flood my every molecule.

nothing flows unnoticed
period

August Hoerr

Distant PLANETS

BY DAVID WYMAN

What in God's name ever happened to Superman's dog? You know: Krypto.

Maybe you *don't* know. Maybe you're too young to remember, maybe you're too old to think about stuff like that, maybe nobody gives a fuck anymore—which is exactly what I've been talking about all along.

Anyway, before Superman moved to the big city of Metropolis and got famous—before he got to be Superman—he was a teenager named Super*boy,* from the little midwestern town of Smallville. Except that he wasn't *really* named Superboy, he was really named "Kal-El." And he wasn't really from Smallville, either; he was really from The Distant Planet Krypton—which literally blew itself to smithereens when Kal-El got to be about two months old.

Except Krypton didn't blow up *because* Kal-El was two months old; it blew up because of Science. I don't understand the physics behind all this, but Kal-El's daddy, Jor-El, was a superscientist from an Advanced Civilization crammed with superscientists, and he had it all figured out—including the fact that if anybody from Krypton came to Earth, they'd automatically have all these Super Powers. And they'd never die. And they'd never get old. Because Krypton had a red sun, and Earth had a yellow sun.

I don't understand the physics behind that either, but when I was a kid, the rules were easier to keep up with. I grew up in a small town, and like most people in America, I had never lived in a place as big as Metropolis. I knew about the crowds and the skyscrapers and the concrete everywhere in a general sort of way, because there were pictures of New York on TV all the time. But TV was in black & white in those days (I was born in 1956), and only comic books were in color; so the real world looked a lot more like Smallville than Metropolis.

Anyway, Jor-El fixed up this spaceship—in his laboratory—and he managed to get Kal-El launched off to Earth just before Krypton blew itself all to hell. Kal-El himself barely made it to Earth in one piece. Not because the ship was crappy or anything, because it wasn't—none of that New Age "spheroid crystal" stuff like in the *movie Superman*; none of those little plastic pieces stuck together with model-airplane glue like in *Star Wars*, either. The artists at D.C., the company that published *Superboy* comics, drew an honest to God *rocketship* for Kal-El: a fat, blue, cast iron bullet. Real mech-tech, with portholes and rivets, and a big needle-thing on the front; with fins on the back to make it go faster, and bright orange flames squirting out of the engine. But it must have run out of gas or something just before it got to Earth, because it crash-landed: in a wheat field, just outside of Smallville, USA; where it was found by kindly old Ma and Pa Kent.

They took the boy home to their little farm-house, fixed him up a second-hand basketball hoop with no net out back of the tool shed, and they named him Clark. Until they found out he could toss around grown cows and tractors. Then they started calling him Superboy—at least, around the house.

II

They "raised him right." Taught him to keep his hair combed, say Please-and-Thank You. Go to church and 4-H Club, be nice to old people.

And take good care of his dog.

I don't remember if the dog rode in the same spaceship with Superboy, or if Jor-El fixed him up one of his own. But he

had the same red sun/yellow sun thing working for him, just like Superboy—super strength , super speed, heat vision, x-ray vision, immortality, all the stuff Superboy could do—just like anybody else who came to Earth from Krypton; I guess that's why Superboy named him "Krypto."

Except Krypto wasn't his *real* name, just like Superboy wasn't Clark Kent's real name. That was just his Secret Identity, because Ma and Pa—kindly, but not stupid—had figured out this scam for Clark, so the neighbors in Smallville wouldn't find out that the Kent boy was the one flying around in those pantyhose (with the underpants on the outside), beating the crap out of all those bad guys and runaway locomotives. So about the time Clark was old enough to go to high school, Pa fixed him up these phony glasses, Ma got him a slide rule—and a pocket protector—and they told Clark that maybe he'd better go out for Drama Club instead of the football team. And he might ought to stay out of fights with the other boys, even Lex Luthor (which was hard, because Lex was not only a bully, he was bald. Even at seventeen, he looked so much like Nikita Kruschev that it's a miracle the cops didn't run his Commie ass right out of Smallville, USA). And of course he should never, ever, even *try* to score off girls (which wasn't so hard, since by the end of his freshman year all the girls just laughed at him anyway, and the cheerleaders didn't even bother to do it behind his back). Because nobody would ever guess he was Superboy if he'd just study hard. Mind his own business. And pretend to be the biggest geek at Smallville High.

Superboy went along with it. He probably knew it was the best thing for everybody under the circumstances, and anyway, there was no point in trying to talk to Ma and Pa Kent about it. They'd lived out their lives in Smallville, under a yellow sun, and they wouldn't understand. Krypto was the only one on the entire planet who really understood him.

So he taught the dog to talk to him, sort of. They had this Morse Code thing they'd do with their eyelids, blinking out letters of the alphabet to make words and sentences. So this boy and his dog really could talk to each other, without anybody else finding out their secrets: "K-r-y-p-t-o," Superboy would blink (with dashes between all the letters in the thought-balloons, so you could tell when they were sending messages). "M-u-s-t g-o b-e-a-t c-r-a-p o-u-t t-r-a-c-t-o-r, n-o-w," And the dog's little thought-balloon would go, "Y-e-s, M-a-s-t-e-r. P-l-e-a-s-e b-r-i-n-g m-e b-a-c-k s-o-m-e A-l-p-o."

He taught Krypto to do the Secret Identity thing, too. He didn't make the dog go around with glasses or anything, but he fixed him up a little cape—I swear to God—so whenever they wanted to go out for some flying practice, they wouldn't be plain old Krypto and Clark: they'd be Superdog and Superboy. And whenever another dog would try to pick a fight with him, Krypto would act real scared and slink away with his tail between his legs, wisely and bravely mastering the impulse to whip around behind the other dog at Super Speed, and bite his ass off.

Superboy went along with it. He probably knew it was the best thing for everybody under the circumstances, and anyway, there was no point in trying to talk to Ma and Pa Kent about it.

Without a doubt, this was the greatest dog any boy could ever hope to have. I mean, Krypto couldn't figure out the physics—all by himself—to bust out of the Fourth Dimension when he and Superboy got trapped there one time; but he could sure as hell do just about anything else. So there was some consolation for all the constraints and disappointments Superman had to put up with when he was a teenager: he at least got to be the only boy on Earth with a dog who knew how to fly.

And what a sight that must have been, for any tired old farmer who happened to glance skyward, at the end of an autumn afternoon, when all the kids in town were on their way home to supper after a long day of classes and football practice at Smallville High. A boy and his dog (both of them wearing capes) looping, diving, barrelling high over the wheatfields and the cornfields, streaking like twin meteors through the violet and amber sunset of the American prairie: a dream—a personification—of freedom and courage; of exuberance, and testosterone, and deathless innocence; of unwavering confidence and unquestioning, inconquerable loyalty.

III

I don't know what happened to Superboy that made him turn his back on all that. But he changed. About the time D.C. raised the price of his comic book from twelve cents, to fifteen cents, to nineteen cents, a quarter. *(continued)*

Maybe the heart went out of Superboy when Ma and Pa Kent failed to return from that vacation they finally got to take in *Superboy* a-hundred-and-ninety-seven (financed, no doubt, by all those extra nickels and pennies now pouring into the coffers of the D.C. Corporation)—that brief but exotic cruise The Folks had been planning for years, a little reward for the honest toil and cheerful sacrifice of a simple life, simply lived. But they died on that trip, kindly old Ma and Pa Kent, of an exotic Carribean disease whose name they couldn't pronounce, among exotic brown people whose strange talk they couldn't understand, two thousand miles (that may as well have been a planet away) from Smallville.

Maybe Superboy didn't feel like spending the rest of his life among a bunch of well-meaning rednecks, with nobody to talk to but Krypto (using the Eyelid Code, of course). Maybe he was afraid the neighbors would get suspicious if he hung around and worked the farm all by himself (in the middle of the night, at Super Speed). Maybe he just wanted to go make it with some girls, for once.

Anyway, Superboy looked around him one day, and decided it was time to leave. And if you really are too old to worry about what happened to some comic book character's dog, it's probably occurred to you that everything Superboy loved about Smallville reminded him of all the things he hated about it. He would miss the wheatfields and the clear night skies, and tubing in the summertime down at the county dam. But Smallville was a pretty backwards, embarrassing place to be from, when you got right down to it. And making a little cape for your dog to wear was pathetic.

He was smarter than all of them, faster and stronger. Why shouldn't he take his place in that other world of nightclubs, and skyscrapers, and gold-cards? Nobody who knew Clark Kent took him seriously, and the only people who knew anything at all about Superboy were gone now.

So Superboy packed his bags, and took off for Metropolis. He got an apartment there—with a balcony and a patio—and plenty of closets, which he quickly filled up with suits. Clark Kent was still "mild mannered" of course, but at least he didn't have to dress like a geek anymore. He got a new pair of glasses—serious black hornrims, the kind CEO's and stockbrokers liked to wear. He got a Rolex too, and fixed it up into that signal watch Jimmy Olsen used whenever the bad guys were around. (It made that irritating-as-shit noise: "ZEE-EEE-EEEE!!!" over three, four, five panels in every issue of *Superman* comics.)

He got a job and a corner office in the Daily Planet building where he'd met Jimmy Olsen, and Lois Lane, and Perry White. He shared an innocent, sexless date with Lois Lane every now and then, and I think he went fishing with Jimmy and Perry White in the Adirondacks a couple of times. They talked about work, mostly—newspapers, supervillains, Commie spies, things like that. And if his new friends from the office seemed more like what he would have called "acquaintances" in Smallville, well, maybe that's just the way people did things in Metropolis; it was easier to hide the Secret Identity that way.

Which is fine. We all have to go through changes in our lives, from time to time.

Except that, when he got to Metropolis—when he canged his name to Superman—he had ditched Krypto. It's not just that Superman didn't bring his dog with him when he moved to Metropolis; it's more like Krypto never even existed.

As a matter of fact, by the time he started working at the Daily Planet, everything about Superman's past had gotten pretty vague. If anybody asked him about it—which they seldom did, because usually they were too busy talking to each other about headlines and expense accounts—he would reply that yes, he had grown up an orphan in a nice little town: "Smallville," he'd volunteer almost as an afterthought, with never a word about what part of Nebraska or Iowa or Kansas that was. And that he'd been raised by a nice elderly couple: "The Kents," he called them, now. But it was all as blurry and indistinct as those ghost-like, lavender and gray-tinted unfortunates condemned forever to the Phantom Zone. (The Phantom Zone was kind of like the Fourth Dimension, except you had to have this superscientific slide-projector thing to get there.)

And he never talked about his old dog in Smallville. He never even mentioned his name. Not to Perry. Not to Lois. Not even to Jimmy Olsen, who was supposedly his best friend. It was as if Superman had "fixed it up" in his mind somehow so that none of the things he loved about Smallville could ever hurt him again—including Krypto. What had it all been, anyway, but a cape and a bunch of made-up names, and a pair of phony glasses? Metropolis was his home planet now.

IV

What, in God's name, did Superman do with his dog?

Did he shoot him? Did he tie him up in a sack and drown him in Smallville Dam? I don't buy that. Don't get me wrong—by the time he got to Metropolis, I think the yuppie bastard was capable of

anything. But Krypto was from Krypton, just like Superman. Bullets would've just bounced off his head. You can't drown somebody from a planet with a red sun; they could hold their breath forever. They could breathe underwater, for all I know; hell, Krypto could breathe in outer space—he and Superboy used to play there all the time, for hours and days on end.

Did he stash the little cape somewhere—a final gesture of contempt for the Secret Identity—and leave him at the vet with no forwarding address? Did he give him to Lex Luthor? Did he dump him at the Smallville Pound on his way out of town? No way. Somebody would have found out; Krypto knew how to *fly*, for Christ's sake. There was no place on Earth where you could just "lose" a dog from Krypton.

So, Superman must have ditched him someplace else.

I have thought about this, and thought about it. Off and on throughout the day, occasionally—staring out the plate glass of some corner office, after I'd grown up and fled to my own Metropolis. All night long sometimes—drinking scotch, alone or with other frightened strangers in the hotel rooms and airport lounges of '87, '89. And there's only one way it all could have gone down:

Just before he split for Metropolis, Superman looked around on the ground beneath the netless basketball hoop out back of the toolshed until he found a stick. Just an old, familiar stick. Then he grabbed the little cape and called his dog: "Krypto! Here, Krypto!" Just like always. "Let's go for a walk, boy."

And the dog came running up, just like always. And he saw the little cape, and he knew what that was all about; then he saw the stick, and he knew what that was all about. And quicker than you can say *Distant Planet Krypton*, they were off: a boy and his dog, rocketing high over the checkerboard fields and watertower of Smallville, up up and away into the atmosphere, the stratosphere, the ionosphere. Hurling themselves—like twin fireballs—straight into the Fourth Dimension.

They paused for a moment in an asteroid belt that had been one of their favorite playgrounds for years. "K-r-y-p-t-o," came the Eyelid Code, just like always. And the little dog blinked back, "Y-e-s, m-a-s-t-e-r. W-h-e-r-e g-o? W-h-a-t d-o?"

Then Superman cocked his arm like a pitcher winding up on the mound, and blinked out a final command to his dog:

"F-e-t-c-h!" he told him.

And the stick went flying, and the dog went flying after it, and Superman knew that Krypto would never return until he'd retrieved that stick—even if it sailed a million, billion miles into the Fourth Dimension.

Then he coolly and efficiently calculated the physics required to bust through the dimensional barrier, tucked his spandexed leg neatly beneath his ass, and streaked back home to Metropolis.

Now, Superman had everything he wanted: a good job and a great apartment; plenty of business contacts in the most important city on Earth; and all those suits.

He probably didn't even stop at a bar on his way back from the Fourth Dimension for a drink, to calm his nerves. He was Superman. From a distant planet with a red sun. And *his* nerves were fine.

V

I don't understand the physics behind all this. But I'll bet it's mighty dark out there, in the Fourth Dimension. It is indescribably dark, and cold, and pointless for a Dog—who cannot die—who waits, with undying loyalty and unquenchable despair, for a Boy who does not come.

Forever.

◆◆◆

Laugh of God

somewhere far far away
on another planet, perhaps
deep in the dark unforseeable Future
I sit

laughing

laughing at all the huge mistakes I'm making here
laughing loud and hard every single time I fuck up
laughing hysterically whenever I think
a suicidal thought

or
start to worry over money
or
getting old
and
feeling old

I sit on my cloud
just slapping my knee and wiping away tears,
it's so damned funny...
all tuned in on my little screen
eating my popcorn and hoping I won't miss too much

when I have to get up

to piss
or
to shit

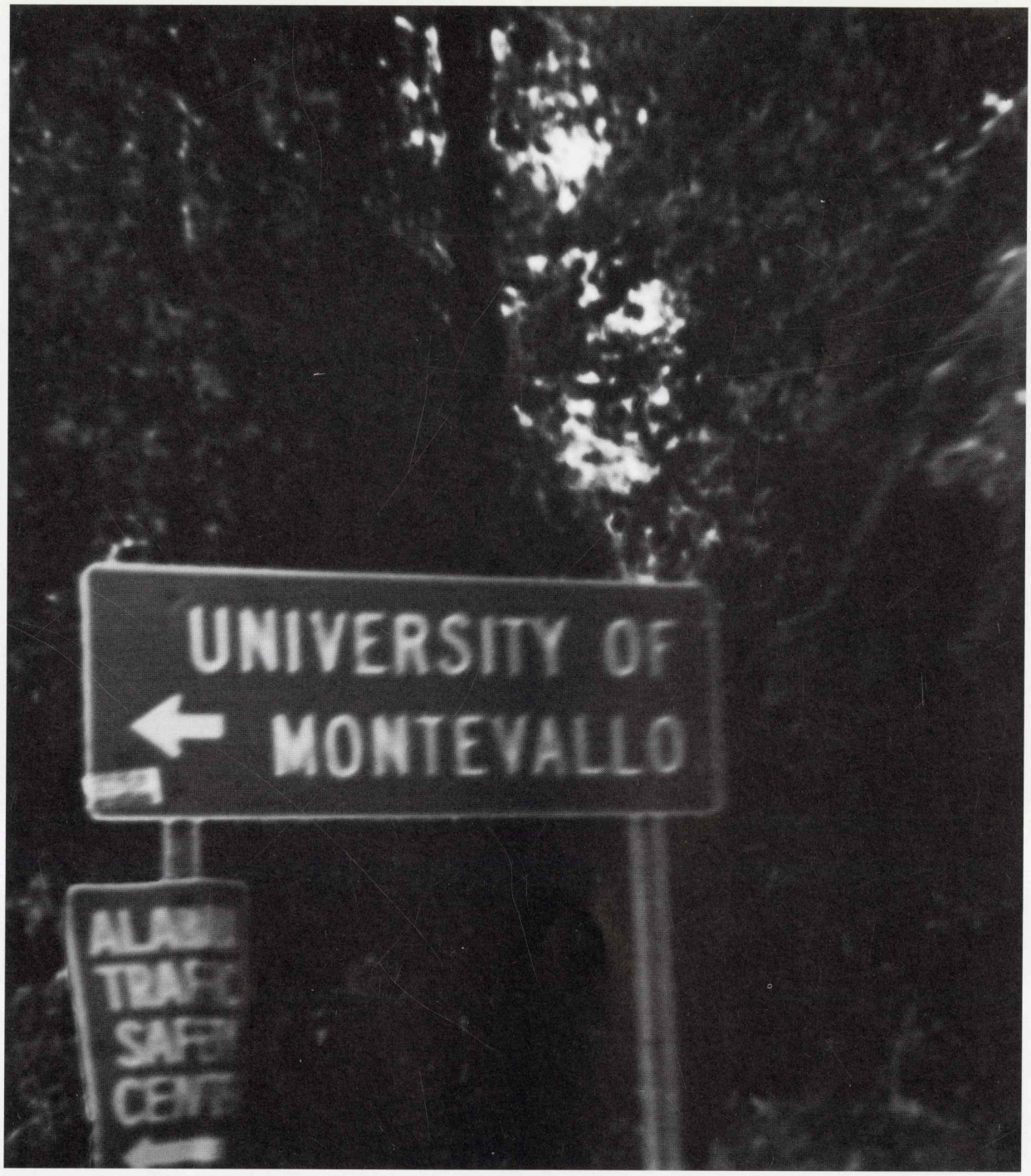
I sit laughing...
I laugh and I laugh...
I point towards each and every ridiculous scene

and cry out breathlessly:

"so young!
so idiotic!
so human!"

Paul Wilm

Untitled
Dirk Statske
Ceramics



Untitled
Amy Griffin
Black & White Photography